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TO: Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary
1919 M St., NW, Washington, DC 20554

FROM: Nancy Signorielli *Nancy Signorielli*
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RE: MM Docket 93-48

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As a professor of communication, specializing in media content and effects particularly as they related to children and as the mother of two children (ages 10 and 12), I am writing in support of proposed rules to improve the quality of programs available to children.

As the Notice of Proposed Rule Making clearly outlines, the current status of programming available to our children is marginal at best. While there are numerous programs geared to children, few provide more than just marginal entertainment. Not that entertainment is the problem. Rather, the images in most of the programs that children watch most of the time rely on the age-old stereotypes, action structures, and proven formulas. Such programs typically show violence as the easiest way to solve problems. The character demography does not present an adequate representation of the world in which we live. Programs tend to over represent males, particularly in the most important roles, while females and people of color rarely appear in the more important and consistent roles. In short, most of the

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programming available does little to help our children expand their knowledge about the world and its peoples and to provide solid role models. Moreover, most programming is found in a commercial-laden environment that does little more than promote consumerism and unhealthy lifestyles.

Television is important in our lives, and particularly in our children's lives. We know that all of us, and particularly our children, watch a lot of television and usually enjoy watching television. What is different today, however, is that compared to previous generations, many of today's children spend much more time, and do more and even perhaps most of their viewing, by themselves. Many children return, after school, to empty houses or apartments to await the return of their parent or parents. Television thus becomes their lifeline -- the thing that keeps them company -- something to watch to make the time go faster. The programming available during the after school hours, however, may do more to foster a child's sense of isolation and vulnerability than to encourage them to think beyond the here and now. In short what we need are good children's programs available in the time slots in which children watch the most--the after-school, late afternoon hours.

Children should have after-school viewing selections that go beyond adult-gear (with very adult topics) talk shows, soap operas, and cartoons. What about a talk-show for and about early adolescents? Children need more specially designed programs that are entertaining yet geared to help them think, wonder, and learn. Programming for children should contain images that will

help foster respect for adults, but still show that children's ideas and what they have to say is important.

Those in the business of producing programming should research what things children are interested in and design programs around these topics. *Nic News*, for example, is an educational program that explores numerous topics of interest to children in a very entertaining manner. This format, for example, is far from "talking heads" examining boring topics.

Game shows for children are another possible educational format that could use more and better offerings. There are several game shows currently available, but many err on the side of being overly "silly" and with little real intellectual substance. How about a *Jeopardy* clone geared to early adolescents?

The situation comedy is another genre that is particular popular with children of all ages and with a little imagination new programs could go beyond the simplistic formulas that abound today. For example, situation comedies that deal with real-life experiences of kids who deal with adults who are portrayed as adults -- not as jerks who are seen as knowing less than their children.

Our children are our most precious resource. We are today, however, shortchanging them (and ultimately ourselves) in not providing them with a solid core of television programming that meets (and goes beyond) the criteria set forth in the Children's Television Act.